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WASH DRESSES THAT WILL WASH

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, June 8, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 104 associate radio stations.

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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JOHN BAKER:

Yes, here we are in Washington ready to carry on as usual for the Department of Agriculture--even though royal salutes have boomed, and most of our friends and relatives are strung out along Pennsylvania Avenue waving to the President and Mrs. Roosevelt and the King and Queen. Washington's used to parades and official receptions. But this has even the old-timers talking.

But here's Ruth Van Deman calm and collected--not at all feazed by this royal hub-bub.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

It's just as well you didn't see me fifteen mimutes ago.

BAKER:

What were you doing--climbing a lamppost or something, trying to see the royalties?

VAN DEMAN:

I was just trying to get a final check on the dresses Mrs. Roosevelt and the Queen are wearing.

BAKER:

That's right--this is the day for those famous wool dresses. Well, I hope the ladies are not catching cold out there on Pennsylvania Avenue.

VAN DEMAN:

It certainly is plenty warm down there. I don't believe they're any warmer in these dresses than they would be in many others. Mrs. Roosevelt's dress is very, very thin wool--almost as sheer as gauze. The yarns in the cloth are very tightly twisted, and smooth.-- And they're woven so there's plenty of air space to let in any cool breezes that come along.

BAKER:

You must have been sitting on top of the lamppost to see all that.

VAN DEMAN:

No, I got that about Mrs. Roosevelt's dress the other day. She gave us a chance to see here dress close-up--at her press conference. She sent her secretary out to unpack it--it had just come from the dressmaker in New York.

BAKER:

But the cloth for it--wasn't it made in England?

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6/8/39

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, the cloth for Mrs. Roosevelt's dress was a gift from the woolen manufacturers of England. The wool was a gift of the wool growers of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa--a blend of the finest fleeces--the very best the British Commonwealth of Nations could produce.

BAKER:

A very graceful international gesture--I'd say.

VAN DEMAN:

Somebody had an international eye for becoming colors too. I'd like to congratulate the person who choose blue for Mrs. Roosevelt's dress. It's a beautiful soft medium shade of blue--very becoming to her blue eyes.

The Queen's dress is more elaborate than our First Lady's. Mrs. Roosevelt always chooses very simple clothes. This wool dress she's wearing today has a plain gored skirt - flaring just enough to be graceful and comfortable. The open V neck is finished with a rolling, pointed collar, piped with white pique. And there's a white pique bow in front to match the white pique bows on her dark blue sailor hat. And her shoes and bag are dark blue.

BAKER:

What's going to happen to this famous dress after today?

VAN DEMAN:

That's one question Mrs. Roosevelt wouldn't answer. She has a plan for her's, that's all she'd say.

BAKER:

Maybe she's going to give it to a museum.

VAN DEMAN:

It's certainly made history.

BAKER:

Or seen history in the making.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, nobody can dispute that. Well, it's something of a come-down from these famous frocks to wash dresses that will wash--that's what I intended to talk about today.

BAKER:

I don't know. If the weather has anything to do with it, this must be a big day for wash dresses too. Anyway, there are a lot of 'em around on the streets.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, I expect the out-of-town visitors, especially the people from Canada, and England, and some of our northern cities--I expect they're astonished at the light summer clothes--especially the cotton dresses--we wear on the street here in Washington. But it's the only way we can dress comfortably and do our work in the hot weather here.



6/8/39

And because our dresses do have to be washed or cleaned so very often, we look for fabrics that can take it--fabrics that have body and won't wrinkle like an old handkerchief at the first wearing. The fabrics with a wrinkle-resistant finish are proving very useful.

Then we check on colorfastness. The dye has to stand sunshine, and perspiration, and soap and water, and a hot iron.

And I like to wear white in summer. Even if it does soil quickly it comes out of the laundry looking very fresh--and colored accessories look so well against white.

Then aside from the fabric, there's the cut of a dress--the way it's stitched --the fastenings--that make it a success or otherwise as a wash dress.

I'm glad the button-down-the-front style is popular this year. A dress like that opens out flat and is very easy to handle on the ironing board.

John, do you think that's doing my duty well enough by the wash dresses today?

BAKER:

Well, now I don't know. Let your conscience be your guide.

VAN DEMAN:

How about letting this leaflet be the guide?

BAKER:

"Quality Guides in Buying Ready-Made Dresses." Looks as though it'd be helpful.

VAN DEMAN:

But I have a few more bits of news about the King and Queen at the White House.

BAKER:

By all means, let's have them. I'll come back to the leaflet later and announce it with due ceremony.

VAN DEMAN:

This is about the luncheon that will be served with due ceremony at the White House in an hour or so.

I called Mrs. Nesbitt, the housekeeper at the White House, the other day and asked her for the mem. Of course she's one of the busiest people in the world right now. But in spite of all that she gave it to me from minted melon balls right down through dessert--all in a friendly straightforward way. I might have been her next-door neighbor asking her over the back fence what she's going to have for dinner.

Here's the mem for the first meal the royalties will eat in the White House.

6/8/39

BAKER:

Luncheon is served!

VAN DEMAN:

First course - minted melon balls--ice cold, of course, with a sprig of mint leaves I suppose in each glass.

Then hot soup--green turtle soup.

And for the main course broiled sweetbreads and mushrooms--saratoga potatoes (potato chips you and I would call them)--and fresh asparagus.

For the salad - hearts of lettuce with roquefort cheese dressing.

And the dessert - it's been changed a time or two. First it was strawberries. But the King and Queen have had more strawberries set before them since they landed on the North American Continent than most of us see all summer. So Mrs. Roosevelt took pity on them. Instead of strawberries, at this luncheon, the dessert will be - pineapple sponge shortcake.

tonight

And, by the way, the White House/and the whole United States is trying to serve our British visitors just as many American foods as possible. All sorts of delicacies have been sent to the White House. The menus have had to be changed again and again to accommodate them. There's salmon from Canada, and terrapin from Maryland.

When asked about the silver and so forth for the table this noon, Mrs. Roosevelt said - "plain ordinary everyday silver and table service".

At the state dinner the gold forks and spoons will come forth, and the beautiful centerpiece dating back to President Monroe's time. And there will be orchids and lilies-of-the-valley and maidenhair fern.

But in the midst of all that grandeur as the bread with one of those courses will be corn pones. I'm sure very dainty little corn pones--but made out of American corn meal all the same.

BAKER:

Well, thank you, Ruth. All these details are most interesting. I guess entertaining royalty is just like any of the rest of us entertaining our friends and relatives from the old home town. We have to see about the food--and what we're to wear--and where the guests are going to lay their heads.

VAN DEMAN:

Oh, speaking of where they're going to lay their heads, have you heard the story about the new mattresses at the White House?

BAKER:

No, that's one I missed.

6/8/39

VAN DEMAN:

When we asked Mrs. Roosevelt at one of her press conferences whether there was going to be any new furniture bought to entertain the King and Queen, she said "no." And then in a minute she said "Except some new mattresses. My children tell me that the mattresses we have in the guest rooms are very hard and very uncomfortable. One always learns the truth from one's children. So we have ordered new mattresses for the guest rooms."

BAKER:

Well, I hope the royalties will rest comfortably on the new mattresses tonight.

And now getting back to that leaflet on ready-made dresses--"Quality Guides in Buying Ready-Made Dresses". I'll just mention again that this is a free leaflet, which can be had by sending a card to the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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